

INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic history of ethnic violence in the late Ottoman Empire

Incorporation, modernisation and interethnic relations

This special issue on ethnic violence in the late Ottoman Empire aims to show that socio-economic history has something new and important to offer to the study of ethnic violence, a field that has so far been dominated by the study of political and ideological factors. The purpose is to go beyond the dichotomy of ideologically motivated, top-down organised (and mostly state-led) campaigns on the one hand and historically conditioned antagonisms in society that lead to “spontaneous” outbursts of violence on the other. The focus of the issue is on the middle ground between the political decision makers at the centre who unleash campaigns of ethnic violence and the executioners – willing or otherwise – on the ground. The question raised is to what extent patterns can be discerned in the processes that lead to the mobilisation of parts of the population for a programme of ethnic violence. The contention is that there are specific social and economic factors that make it possible for a radical ideological programme to resonate with the prejudices of sections of the population in such a way that they come to fear their neighbours as a lethal threat and then act on that fear.

The case studies have been taken from a decade in the twilight of the Ottoman Empire (1895-1915), a period that stands out as one of the most brutal in the history of the bloody twentieth century. It was a period of rapid change for the Ottoman lands. The integration of the Ottoman Empire into the world economy, dominated by Europe, picked up speed again from the mid-1890s. Whereas this integration had been spearheaded by trade in the 1830s and 1840s, from the Crimean War onwards European influence had grown primarily through loans to the Ottoman State. The default of the empire in 1875 led to the consolidation of all Ottoman external debts and the establishment of the *Caisse de la Dette Publique Ottomane* in 1881, which granted European creditors direct control over a number of important sources of tax revenue (salt, tobacco, fisheries) as well as a right of veto over new loans that were to be contracted. This considerably deepened European involvement in the

Ottoman economy. Although there had been some direct investment, mainly in railways and ports from the 1860s, direct investment started to grow quite rapidly from the late 1880s onwards, the start of the period studied in this special issue.¹

The growing integration with Europe had changed the internal balances in the empire. The Ottoman Empire had always been an Islamic empire, even if as late as the mid-nineteenth century Muslims made up only about sixty per cent of its population. The forty per cent who were not Muslims (Christians and Jews) had been allocated a place in this Islamic empire according to the rules of Sharia law. They were granted the right to profess their own religion in exchange for heavier taxation and a whole range of restrictive measures that subordinated them to the Muslim majority. Christian and Jewish communities were granted a degree of autonomy where the settling of internal disputes and matters of family law were concerned. While the legal framework for this arrangement was the same for the whole empire, the practical elaboration of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims was left to the local level – Ottoman administrators on one side and the representatives of the minorities (bishops, popes, rabbis and elders) on the other. It was only in the nineteenth century that these arrangements acquired an empire-wide organisational framework, with hierarchical structures headed by the Greek and Armenian patriarchs and the Chief Rabbi in Constantinople; the so-called *millet* system (*millet* meaning “nation”, but in the early modern sense of a community).² This development mirrored the development of a centralised bureaucratic Ottoman state between the 1830s and 1890s.

Subjects of European powers who lived and worked in the Ottoman Empire had been granted the status of *müstemin* (someone granted free passage) under Sharia law. Their status had been officially recognised in deeds granted by the Ottoman sultans since the fifteenth century, deeds that were called “capitulations” in European parlance. Representatives of European states (ambassadors and consuls) had been granted the right to apply for the same status for some of their locally-hired servants, most notably their interpreters (the *dragomans*). Until the end of the eighteenth century this concerned only a very small number of individuals, but over the next decades the number exploded as more and more members of the Christian (and to a lesser extent Jewish) communities, who engaged in trade with Europe (but were not employed by the foreign consulate), applied for this protected status. From a few hundred the number went up to tens of thousands.

1. See Şevket Pamuk, *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820-1913. Trade, Investment and Production* (Cambridge 1987) 55-81.

2. Benjamin Braude, “Foundation Myths of the Millet System”, in: Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society* (New York 1982) vol. 1, 69-82.

In 1856 the Ottoman state entered the “Concert of Europe.” The price it had to pay was to recognise full equality before the law of all Ottoman subjects, which of course meant ending the traditional system that treated Christians and Jews as protected but second-class subjects. This change was codified in the Ottoman Law on nationality of 1869. With this modernisation, the representatives of European powers lost their ability to extend their protection over local Christians. However, increasing numbers of Greek- or Syrian Orthodox, Jacobites, Armenians, Maronites and Jews now acquired a foreign passport. In the age of imperialism, this gave them enormous advantages vis-à-vis both the Ottoman authorities and their Muslim competitors, who had to pay higher taxes and could not call in the help of foreign consuls in disputes.

The result was the growth of a strong non-Muslim bourgeoisie that by the end of the century dominated the growing commercial and industrial sectors as well as much of the service sector (hotels, restaurants). The newly emancipated Christian bourgeoisie adopted a European bourgeois lifestyle with all the trimmings: cafés, gentlemen’s clubs, theatres, sports clubs and charitable societies, which functioned completely separately from the Muslim society surrounding it. The Ottoman society of the period relating to our four articles, therefore, was in many ways a deeply segregated one.³

There had been sporadic outbursts of Muslim discontent with this changing balance of power in society, most notably in Syria in 1860, and in Crete from the Sixties onwards, but major ethnic conflict erupted only in the 1890s. In the conflicts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the Ottoman state played a major role, as is shown in the articles in this special issue.

The Ottoman sultan at the head of this state was Abdülhamid II, who not only reigned but also ruled from 1876 to 1908 and reigned for one year after that. His rule was primarily a period in which the Ottoman state tried to recover from the disastrous losses of the war with Russia in 1877-78, which had ended with the Russian army on the outskirts of Constantinople. So, Abdülhamid’s reign was one of consolidation but it was also the culmination of a century-long process of modernisation and centralisation. By the end of his reign the central bureaucracy of the empire was sixty times as big as it had been a century before and the empire was connected through a network of telegraph lines owned by the state. New barracks and state schools had been built in every major provincial centre; as had clock towers indicating both Ottoman and European time, standardised for the empire. In this sense, Abdülhamid was a modernising monarch, but at the same time he and the circle of statesmen with whom he surrounded himself were ideologically

3. See Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire. Ottoman Modernization and Social Change*, (Oxford 1996), but also: Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey. A Study in Capitalist Development* (London 1987) 1-48.

extremely conservative. They accurately identified liberalism and nationalism (along with anarchism and socialism, which were often used as labels for the same thing) as the great dangers threatening the empire and saw in the propagation of a state-controlled version of Sunni Islam the best antidote. This Islamist policy (propagated by a monarch who privately enjoyed cigarettes, brandy, the cinema and Sherlock Holmes) tended to alienate the non-Muslim communities.

Abdülhamid's regime also alienated an important constituent of the young bureaucrats and military officers that were produced in large numbers by the empire's new, Western-style training colleges.⁴ They had been obliged to learn French during their studies and came under the influence of French positivism and (through French translations) German materialism and they saw the government of Sultan Abdühamid as fundamentally outdated and at odds with modernity. Their rallying cry was the restoration of the Ottoman constitution of 1876 and the reconvening of parliament (which had been prorogued by Abdülhamid in 1878). They thought this would produce responsible government as well as a commitment to the state by all the different ethnic and religious elements in the country; ultimately, though, a parliamentary, constitutional regime was not a goal in itself, but rather a means to a higher goal: the preservation and strengthening of the Ottoman state. They were deeply convinced that the state was in mortal danger and that it had to be modernised quickly and radically on the basis of science and rationalism.⁵

In 1889 (not coincidentally, the anniversary of the French revolution) they formed the first secret society, in the military medical school in the capital. The opposition movement was uncovered by the sultan's secret police in 1896 and from then on it was based abroad, in places like Paris and Geneva, where its leaders presented themselves as the representatives of "Young Turkey" (*La Jeune Turquie*). Officially, the main faction of this Young Turk movement was known as the "Committee for Union and Progress" (*CUP*, *İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*), a name echoing the positivist motto "*Ordre et Progrès*."

For a decade, the activities of the committee remained confined to agitation from abroad, mostly in the form of pamphlets and newspapers, but by 1906 more activist people became influential. The *CUP* became a real factor within the empire when young bureaucrats and military officers in Selanik/Thessaloniki, led by Mehmed Talât, a postal official, started to organise an underground network. This network spread throughout the officer corps of the Second and Third Ottoman Army in Macedonia and Thrace and in 1907 this new, internal organisation merged with the Paris-based *CUP*. When the discussions between King Edward VII of Great Britain and Tsar Nicholas II

4. François Georgeon, *Abdülhamid II Le sultan calife* (Paris 2003) 140-141. Georgeon's study is by far the best available biography of the sultan.

5. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford 1995).

of Russia in Reval/Tallinn in June 1908 seemed to create an imminent danger of direct foreign intervention in Macedonia, the Young Turks decided to act and unleashed a rebellion against the sultan, demanding the restoration of parliament and the constitution. On 24 July 1908 the sultan yielded and the Ottoman Empire became a constitutional monarchy. This constitutional revolution was greeted with great enthusiasm by all the different ethnic and religious groups, at least in the urban centres of the empire; but it soon transpired that the understanding of what the revolution was about differed a great deal between the CUP, on the one hand, and the Christian communities and their organisations, on the other. For the Unionists (as CUP members were called), a constitutional parliamentary regime was a means to an end: getting the different communities to commit to a unified strengthened state. For many of the Greek, Armenian (and some Albanian and Arab) organisations, the constitutional order was something that could and should increase the opportunities for them to be both Ottoman citizens and members of their communities. In other words: for the Unionists, empowering the state was the central issue; for the minorities it was limiting the state.

The Unionists regarded the attitude of the minorities with deep distrust even before the constitutional revolution. Given their background, this is understandable. The vast majority of the 2000 or so members of the committee in July 1908 were young army officers, most of whom hailed from the most contested areas of the empire and who had cut their teeth professionally in counter-insurgency warfare against Greek, Serb and Bulgarian guerillas and Albanian bands in the Ottoman Balkans. Their identity as Muslim-Turkish defenders of the Ottoman state had been forged in this environment.⁶

Between the constitutional revolution of 1908 and 1913 the CUP functioned as a political pressure group, with a large representation in parliament but ultimately relying on its following in the army to influence events. Its power was gradually eroded, but then it made a spectacular comeback. In October 1912 the Ottoman Empire came under attack from four allied Christian Balkan states. Its armies were defeated in the field within a month and when it appeared that the government was ready to cede the last Ottoman fortress city holding out, the old capital Edirne, to the Bulgarians, the Unionists decided to act. In a coup d'état they took over power on 13 January 1913. From then on, until the end of World War One, the Committee of Union and Progress ruled the country as a virtual dictatorship and it was during this five-year period that ethnic violence reached its peak. The bloodiest and most contentious ethnic conflict of the period was, of course, the Armenian genocide and it is in the study of this issue that this special issue has its roots.

6. Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building. From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London 2010) 95-123.

The politics of the Armenian genocide and WATS

For almost a century, the “Armenian Question” has been among the most politicised topics in modern history. The question of how the events of 1915 in Ottoman Anatolia should be interpreted has divided the academic community, with the historical establishment in the Republic of Turkey and a fairly limited number of (almost exclusively American) scholars on one side, and Armenian scholars, supported by the vast majority of the international historical community as well as a small but increasing number of “dissident” Turkish historians on the other.

At first sight it seems strange that an event of such magnitude (covering an area larger than France and affecting at least a million people) should still cause such debate, not about details of the event or the particular role of individuals, but about the fundamental nature of what happened. This is especially strange considering that, ever since the events themselves, there has been no lack of documentary evidence available to historians. Almost immediately after the events of 1915-16 two major collections of documents were published: the Bryce Report⁷ in the UK (actually composed by the young Arnold Toynbee) and the Lepsius Report⁸ in Germany. While it is true that the first served a purpose in the British propaganda effort during the war and the second was at least partly intended to exonerate Germany as a possible accomplice, the vast majority of the documents were authentic. German and Austrian (and neutral) army officers, missionaries and consular officials, who witnessed the deportations and the slaughter reported to their superiors at home. Their reports found their way into the archives. Survivor testimonies, both written and oral, were collected after the war and made accessible in col-

7. The original Bryce Report was a Blue Book commissioned and published by the British parliament in 1916. In its original version, many of the place names and personal names had been redacted in order to protect the sources in the Ottoman Empire. In 2000, Ara Sarafian published a critical edition of the Blue Book, in which the blanks were filled in on the basis of Toynbee’s private papers, thus refuting the Turkish claim that it had been an exercise in war propaganda built on fabrications. Cf. Ara Sarafian (ed.), James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916. Documents presented to Viscount Grey of Falloden by Viscount Bryce* (London 2000 2005).

8. The missionary Johannes Lepsius had already published a *Bericht über die Lage des Armenischen Volkes in der Türkei* in Germany in 1916. It was banned in August 1916 but by then had already been distributed widely. His *Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918. Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke* (Potsdam 1919) for a long time was regarded as the standard sourcebook on the issue, but after research by several scholars (Hans-Lukas Kieser, Hilmar Kaiser) had already shown that some of the documents had been manipulated, in 2000 German journalist Wolfgang Gust published a full comparison of the originals from the German Foreign Ministry archives with Lepsius’ book. This showed conclusively that the documents had been doctored extensively to exonerate the German government. Cf: www.Armenocide.net (24.02.2013).

lections, the most important one of which is the Nubar Library in Paris.⁹ Ottoman archives, particularly military ones, also contain a wealth of information on the issue, making up in part for the disappearance of the archives of the Young Turk Committee of Union and Progress, which was the real centre of power in the Ottoman Empire during World War One and the place where the most important decisions on the genocide were taken. Access to many of these archives remains restricted, however. Finally, many Ottoman administrators gave their evidence during the trials conducted against perpetrators of the genocide in Istanbul in 1919-20.¹⁰

That events that were so momentous and well-documented can still give rise to fundamental disagreement about their nature a century on, is largely due to the political developments of the twentieth century and here the Armenian and the Turkish side, although diametrically opposed in terms of facts and analysis, share a chronology.

Under the Peace Treaty of Sèvres (1920), the Armenians were promised an independent state in Eastern Anatolia and Armenians were given the right to return to the projected French zone of influence in Cilicia.¹¹ By 1921, however, it was clear that neither was going to materialise and that the Entente powers France and Britain were unable to make good on their promises. The Peace Treaty of Lausanne (1923) confirmed the territorial integrity of the new Turkey, granting the remaining Armenians in Turkey only some cultural minority rights. Faced with this *fait accompli*, the surviving Armenians in the diaspora, whether in the Middle East, in Europe or in the United States, by and large concentrated on rebuilding their lives and integrating in the host societies.

In Turkey meanwhile, the successful resistance against the carving up of the country under the Sèvres treaty led to the establishment of a republic, in whose leadership perpetrators of the genocide of 1915 were well represented. That was no coincidence. Those involved had much to lose, both in terms of

9. The Bibliothèque Nubar of the Union Générale de Bienfaisance Arménienne was founded in Paris in 1928 by Boghos Nubar Pasha, the former head of the Armenian delegation at the Paris peace conference.

10. The reports on these trials were used extensively by Armenian genocide scholar Vahakn Dadrian and Turkish sociologist Taner Akçam. See Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Specifics of the Documents Lodged with the Key Indictment", in: "The Armenian Genocide in Official Turkish Records. Collected Essays by Vahakn N. Dadrian", *Journal of Political and Military Sociology (Special edition)* 22/1 (Summer 1994), 165-171.

11. The use of terms like Cilicia, derived from antiquity, by the diplomats of 1919-20 is in itself a problem. Cilicia, but also Palestine, Syria or Mesopotamia did not have clearly defined borders, and these terms did not correspond to any Ottoman administrative unit. Cilicia, as it was discussed in Paris, more or less corresponded to the northern half of the Ottoman province of Haleb (Aleppo), with towns like Antep, Marash, Urfa, Mersin and Adana.

possible persecution for their actions in 1915-16 and in terms of losing the new-found wealth as a result of the dispossession and redistribution of Armenian properties; they had a strong incentive, therefore, to join the national resistance movement after World War One. The later republican leadership was forged in the crucible of the national independence war of 1919-1922. This “Kemalist” republican leadership (named after its leader, Young Turk General Mustafa Kemal) had no incentive at all to distance itself from a recent past in which many of its core members had been involved and on which, in a sense, the Turkish nation state was built.

The policy of the early republic, therefore, was one, not of denial, but of silence. Only twenty-seven years after the proclamation of the republic, in 1950, a book on the issue was published in Turkey. This book, called “The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question”¹² was essentially a highly selective presentation of translated documents that intended to show the Armenians as the guilty party. It was the work of Esat Uras, a republican parliamentarian, who had been director of intelligence in the Interior Ministry during the genocide. After the publication of this single book, the Turkish side remained silent on the issue for another twenty-five years.

In the 1970s, the situation on the Armenian side changed. In part, this had to do with the fact that the survivors, who for the most part had been children in 1915, were reaching old age and, as they did, felt a need to revive the traumatic memories of the genocide. Just like many holocaust survivors, after a lifetime of silence, they started talking to the younger generations about their experiences, a process well described by the Armenian-American poet Peter Balakian in his book *Black Dog of Fate*.¹³ This development came into the open when a 77-year old Armenian man, who had lost 26 relatives in 1915, seemingly out of the blue killed the Turkish consul and vice-consul in Los Angeles in January 1973. This inspired a younger generation of Armenians and, by the mid-Seventies, Armenian activism replaced the relatively invisible hurt and anger of the preceding fifty years. This activism took place on two levels. In Lebanon, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) was founded by young militants, who were trained and supported by Palestinian fighters. Over the next decade it would unleash a terror campaign that cost the lives of dozens of Turkish diplomats. At the same time, Armenian organisations in the United States and in European countries started to lobby for official recognition of the Armenian genocide. This, in turn, triggered a Turkish reaction. From the end of the Seventies, and particularly after the

12. Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Sorunu* (Istanbul 1950). A vastly expanded version of the book was published in English by the Turkish government in 1988 as *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question*.

13. Peter Balakian, *Black Dog of Fate. An American Son Discovers his Armenian Past* (New York 1997).

military takeover of 12 September 1980, the Turkish authorities orchestrated a publicity campaign with the purpose of establishing a counter-narrative. The three elements in this counter-narrative were

1. contesting the numbers of Armenian victims (200,000 rather than the 1-1.5 million claimed by Armenians);
2. emphasising the role of the Ottoman Armenians as a 'fifth column' of the Russian army; and
3. interpreting the events of 1915 as interethnic violence between Muslims and Christians, rather than a centrally orchestrated policy, thus denying the genocidal character of the events.

The counter-narrative was produced mainly by Turkish academics, but several American historians (Stanford Shaw, Justin McCarthy, Heath Lowry and later Guenter Lewy) supported the main Turkish theses.

This rewriting of history, and in particular the denial of genocide, in turn enraged Armenian opinion. It led to a court case in France against renowned Ottomanist Bernard Lewis of Princeton (in which he was convicted of denialism) and also to a wave of new publications by Armenian and dissident Turkish authors, such as Vahakn Dadrian, Taner Akçam, Raymond Kevorkian and Fuat Dündar, which emphasised the premeditated and systematic character of the mass murder of the Armenians. By the beginning of the twenty-first century the debate had become extremely politicised, revolving around the question of whether there had been a genocide or not. With international tribunals being established to look into other genocides, such as those in Rwanda and Bosnia, the issue was not one for historians alone. Potentially, recognition of the genocide had important legal consequences, such as restitution of Armenian property and compensation.

In this highly politicised atmosphere a group of faculty and students at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, led by Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek and Gerard (Jrair) Libaridian, decided to found a group committed to a joint investigation, by Armenians, Turks and others, into the historical truth about the events of 1915. The intention was explicitly not to concentrate on the "politics of recognition and denial," but to gain a deeper understanding of what had happened, its causes and effects. This was the Workshop for Armenian-Turkish Scholarship (WATS), founded in 2000. It is very important that the historians and social scientists involved in WATS did not aim for compromise regarding the genocide issue, but rather for consensus on the basis of undisputed facts and interpretations. Although most of the members of WATS subscribed to the idea that, when the terms of the 1948 United Nations convention are applied, or indeed the earlier formulation by the inventor of the term Raphael Lemkin, the events of 1915 clearly qualify as a genocide. They also recognised that the politicised debate on this aspect had reached a dead end and that it was more useful to analyse the events without concentrating on the issue of labelling.

WATS VIII – The Amsterdam Conference

Since 2000, WATS has held a series of conferences, alternating between the United States and Europe and some of the most important results of the first seven of these conferences were published in 2011 by Oxford University Press.¹⁴ At the seventh conference (Berkeley, 2010) it was decided that, after the publication of the volume, the time had come to broaden the theme of the WATS conferences and to try to contextualise the Armenian genocide by looking at other instances of ethnic conflict and persecution in the final decades of the Ottoman Empire – instances involving Jews, Greek-Orthodox, Syrian Christians, Nestorians and Kurds as well as Armenians and Turks. Hence, the theme of the eighth WATS conference was announced as “The Peoples of Empire: The millet system and the last years of the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th centuries)”. In looking at a variety of ethnic conflicts, the organisers did not want to suggest that the Ottoman Empire, Turks or Muslims had a primordial propensity for violence (a suggestion that sometimes seems to inspire the work of authors like Dadrian). Rather, they saw the last decades of the Ottoman Empire as an important stage in what could be termed the “century of demographic engineering” in Europe, which started with the mass exodus of Muslims from the coasts of the Black Sea and the Caucasus in the 1850s and more or less ended with the expulsion of 12 to 14 million Germans from eastern Europe after World War Two.¹⁵

WATS VIII was held in cooperation with the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD-CHGS) and the International Institute of Social History (IISH) and took place on 27-29 October 2011 at the IISH in Amsterdam. The conference had a very full programme and it was interesting to see that the broadening of the theme of the conference brought with it the participation of a large number of representatives of a new generation of researchers, from Turkey as well as from Europe and the United States.¹⁶ After the conference, the WATS committee decided to invite four of these younger scholars – Sinan Dinçer, Doğan Çetinkaya, Emre Erol and Ümit Uğur Üngör – who had presented papers that were interconnected by their attention to the mechanisms of social mobilisation for ethnic violence, to rework their papers into articles

14. Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek and Norman M. Naimark, *A Question of Genocide. Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford 2011).

15. Erik Jan Zürcher, “Giriş: Demografi Mühendisliği ve Modern Türkiye’nin Doğuşu” [Introduction: Demographic Engineering and the Birth of Modern Turkey], in: Erik Jan Zürcher (ed.), *İmparatorluktan Cumhuriyete Türkiye’de Etnik Çatışma* [Ethnic Conflict in Turkey from Empire to Republic] (Istanbul 2005) 9-19. The term is derived from: J. McGarry, “‘Demographic Engineering’: The State-directed Movement of Ethnic Groups as a Technique of Conflict Regulation”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21/4 (1998) 613-638.

16. Cf. <http://socialhistory.org/nl/events/workshop-armenian-turkish-scholarship> (22.02.2013).

for a thematic special issue of a journal. In 2012, the result of their work was submitted to TSEG.

This special issue

It is important to note that, even if each of the contributors to this special issue is a young Turkish historian and all of the contributions focus on events in late Ottoman and Turkish history, the purpose of this special issue is not primarily to gain a better understanding of Turkish history or to gauge the role of ethnic violence in the emergence of modern Turkey. That topic is extremely important. The transition from empire to nation state is never a painless process, but it was particularly violent in the Ottoman/Turkish case. In the decade of almost continuous warfare between 1911 and 1922 3.5-4 million inhabitants of what is now Turkey lost their lives and millions more were displaced and ended up as refugees. However, if the purpose were to fully understand the role of ethnic violence in the shaping of Turkey and the other nation states that arose out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, other cases would have to be presented as well: the massacre of Armenians in Adana in 1909, but also the “aftershocks” of nation state formation, the anti-Jewish pogrom in 1934 in Turkish Thrace and the anti-Greek pogrom in Istanbul in September 1955. The atrocities against the Alevi Kurds of Dersim in 1937-38, to which some have attributed a genocidal character, would have to be included as well. Even more important: the extreme violence to which Muslims in the Caucasus and the Balkans were exposed from the 1860s onwards and which turned Anatolia and Syria into a resettlement area for refugees long before World War One needs to be taken into account. It can be seen as the first step in a long chain of cause and effect.

The purpose of this special issue is more limited and at the same time more general. It does not aim to give a full and balanced interpretation of the role of ethnic violence in late Ottoman and Turkish history. Instead, it wants to present a number of case studies of ethnic violence to see to what extent patterns can be recognised that can be generalised and thus can give us a better understanding of the mechanisms at work. In this sense, it reflects the concerns of experts on ethnic cleansing and genocide, like historical sociologist Michael Mann and historian Norman Naimark, even if among our case studies only one qualifies as genocide and one other as ethnic cleansing.

The articles in this special issue cover a period from 1895 to 1915, covering a broad range of geographies, from the capital city Istanbul to port towns like Izmir and Foça and a major provincial centre like Diyarbakır. Different ethnic groups were involved: Turks, Kurds and Circassians on the side of the perpetrators, Greeks and Armenians on the side of the victims. The degree of violence also varies widely: in the case of the boycott movement described

by Çetinkaya, although there were armed confrontations and beatings, the real violence lay in the fact that it was an attempt to eliminate first Greek nationals and then Greek-Orthodox citizens from economic life. In the case of the expulsion of the Greek Orthodox from Foça that Erol describes, the real physical violence in the sense of beatings, rape and killings was again limited, but of course a campaign of intimidation that forces up to 150,000 people in Western Asia Minor to leave their ancestral homes and to rebuild their lives elsewhere is violent enough in itself. The anti-Armenian pogroms of 1895 and 1896 in Istanbul that are analysed by Dinçer did witness a lot of physical violence. They bear a certain resemblance to the classic pogroms in the Russian Empire. Finally, in Diyarbakır in 1915, the events described by Üngör involved extreme brutality and massacres on a massive scale.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the differences over time and space, we can discern a number of factors that played a role in each or in most of these cases, some of them ideological and political, others social and economic.

Common factors

Actors: The central state

Firstly, there are the actors. According to Norman Naimark, the famous historian of genocide, three levels of actors can usually be discerned: those at the level of the central state, the local officials and authorities and the population at large.¹⁷ This would seem to hold true for all four case studies. In the case of the clashes between Armenians and Kurds and the subsequent massacres in Istanbul in 1895-6, Dinçer shows that it is impossible to prove whether the government of Sultan Abdülhamid II encouraged or armed the Muslim mob that attacked the Armenians, but he considers it likely. What is evidently true, is that the government used the conflict to eliminate the Armenian migrant labour in the capital as a social force and a political threat. Çetinkaya demonstrates that the boycott movement was, in fact, the result of a decision by the central leadership of the Committee of Union and Progress to mobilise the population in a controlled fashion to support its political aims (although the movement proved very difficult to control in practice). In the case of the 1914 expulsion of the Greek orthodox from Foça, there is no doubt whatsoever that it was ordered by the central committee of the Young Turk CUP, however much CUP leader and interior minister Talât Pasha might protest that it was a spontaneous movement. The consensus of responsible historians nowadays

17. Norman Naimark, "Preface", in: Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek and Norman M. Naimark, *A Question of Genocide. Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford 2011) xvi.

is that the treatment meted out to the Armenians in 1915 was part of a centrally orchestrated policy that aimed at the “ethnic cleansing” of Anatolia and turning it into a Muslim land. There are very good reasons for calling this a genocide, precisely because it was a deliberate policy decided by the centre.

Actors: The meso-level

Naimark’s second category, that of the local intermediaries (what he calls the “meso-level”), is much in evidence as well. In the case of Istanbul in 1895-6, there seems to have been a degree of competition between the interior ministry and the municipal authorities, notably the mayor and the police, vying for the favour of the palace. In the case of the boycotts, influential Muslim traders as well as guild leaders seem to have been the driving force, quite often putting pressure on the local representatives of the state. They basically turned the boycott from a political instrument, designed to give the Ottoman state leverage in the diplomatic arena, into an economic one, designed to eliminate their non-Muslim competitors. On the west coast of Anatolia in 1914 it was party bosses like Mahmut Celâl, who, together with local officials like the district governor of Foçateyn, organised the campaign against the Greek orthodox, while, in Diyarbakır it was the strong personal commitment and fanatical nationalism of the governor Mehmet Reşit that accounts, at least in part, for the ferocity of the onslaught on the Armenians.

Actors: The population

Then, there are the “willing executioners”, the people who are actually mobilised for violence and are ready to kill and steal: religious students and Kurdish migrant workers in 1895-6, guild members, port workers and lightermen in 1912, bands of brigands and groups of refugees from the Balkans in 1914, the Muslim townspeople and particularly the Kurdish competitors of the Armenian artisans and industrialists in Diyarbakır, 1915.

Actors: Paramilitaries

According to Michael Mann,¹⁸ the existence of paramilitaries and armed militias is a vital precondition for genocidal violence. Indeed, in the most extreme cases, the ones that led to the complete removal of an entire community in 1914 and 1915, paramilitaries did play a key role. On the west coast, *çetes* or armed gangs, purposely created a panic among the Greek Orthodox popula-

18. For Mann’s enumeration of the conditions that, first, create a climate conducive to ethnic cleansing and then lead to ethnic cleansing, see Chapter 1: The Argument, in: Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy. Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge 2005) 1-33.

tion, while Mehmet Reşit relied primarily on his Circassian militia for the removal of the Armenians of Diyarbakır. While militias were not used in Istanbul in 1985-6, the regiments of Kurdish tribal irregulars called *Hamidiye Alayları* that Dinçer mentions (and that had been modelled on the Russian Cossack regiments) were mobilised by the state in Eastern Anatolia in 1895-6 and killed some 90,000 Armenians.

Ideology

What was the role of ideology in these examples of ethnic conflict? According to Michael Mann, the most dangerous situation is created when imminent ideological concepts that reinforce pre-existing social identities intersect with modern ideologies, such as nationalism, fascism or communism, that aim to move beyond the existing social organisation. This situation does not seem to hold in the case of the 1895-6 persecution of Armenians that Dinçer describes. The Armenians that protested in 1895 were not ideological Armenian nationalists. The grievances they ventilated with their demonstration had to do with oppression and changing power relations in Eastern Anatolia, where Sultan Abdülhamit's policy of concluding alliances with regional power brokers (in this case Sunni Muslim Kurdish tribes) had changed the balance of power and made Armenian villagers vulnerable to extortion and violence. The Armenians who attacked and occupied the Ottoman Imperial Bank in 1896 did have a nationalist as well as a socialist agenda, but they also wanted to attract attention to their demands for improvement of conditions in the East, not claim an Armenian state. Nor were the religious students or Kurdish porters that attacked them influenced by any kind of modern ideology. The sultan's government, for its part, regarded the Armenian agitation with great suspicion. Abdülhamit's reign was in many ways a period of recovery after the lost war of 1877-78, which had started when Russia intervened on the side of a Bulgarian nationalist rebellion. The Ottoman government was well aware that the Berlin Treaty of 1878, which had ended the war, contained a clause on reforms in Eastern Anatolia under international supervision. It saw the Armenian agitation as a serious threat and seems to have used Muslim unease about what was seen as Armenian tendencies to disrupt the existing social order, but it was not yet motivated by a form of Turkish, or Ottoman, nationalism.

In the three other cases, Mann's paradigm does seem to apply. There was a well-established pre-existing set of social identities, the "*millet* system" under which non-Muslim communities had been allocated a separate (and subordinate) position in society. Even though the system was officially abolished in 1856, religious identities continued to be powerful ethnic markers within Ottoman society. By the late nineteenth century this became overlaid with the modern ideology of nationalism. The Turks were among the last communi-

ties to embrace nationalism. In 1910, 1914 or 1915 this was still a nationalism that defined the Ottoman Muslims, rather than Turks, as the in-group, but the result was the same: the old Christian communities of Anatolia were redefined as foreign elements that had to be eliminated. With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and the deliberate choice for nation-building on the basis of a Turkish identity, assimilation rather than elimination became the norm.

Economic competition

It is clear that economic competition played a major role in each of the cases described. Armenians, who had migrated from inland Anatolia, had obtained a dominant position in the port of Istanbul over the course of the nineteenth century. Kurdish migrant labour was also attracted to the low-skilled professions like that of porter (*hamal*), but it was virtually excluded from the places (the docks, the custom house, the railway station) where the work was most profitable. The elimination of the Armenians gave them the opportunity to take over their position in the labour market. This was, of course, the result and not the main cause of the violence, but it is very likely that the tensions in the labour market and the rivalry between Armenians and Kurds over jobs were a factor that motivated the perpetrators of the pogrom.

As Çetinkaya shows, the 1910 boycott was very much motivated by economic rivalry at the grassroots level. Uniting under the banner of nationalism, port workers and lightermen, dockworkers and stevedores managed to strengthen their position and have their rights (and wages) increased. The porters in Izmir, for instance, managed to get the rule rescinded that limited Muslims to one third of the jobs in the port. Economic competition is less in evidence on the ground in Foça in 1914, but it did play a very important role in the thinking of those, like Celâl and Talât, who organised the expulsions. As we learn from Erol's article, they framed the Greek Orthodox Ottomans (*Rum*) as parasites that profited from the Ottoman Empire, while at the same time using their profits to strengthen the empire's enemies. Diyarbakır's governor Mehmet Reşit had expressed similar views when he toured the west coast in 1913,¹⁹ and in 1915 he saw the Armenians as an economic as well as a political threat. Economic rivalry played an important role in Diyarbakır in 1915. Üngör tells us how the forced removal of the Armenians allowed Kurdish notables, such as the Pirinççizade family, to take over the important copper industry of the region.

19. Hans-Lukas Kieser, "From 'Patriotism' to Mass Murder: Dr. Mehmed Reşid (1873-1919)", in: Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek and Norman M. Naimark, *A Question of Genocide. Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford 2011) 133-36.

Migration

The last factor whose influence can be traced in each of these cases of ethnic violence, is migration. The groups that clashed most visibly in Istanbul in 1895 and 1896 were both migrants from the underdeveloped Eastern Anatolian provinces: Armenians and Kurds and their clashes were directly linked to ethnic tensions in their areas of origin. The Armenian demonstration that started it all came after a protest against the maltreatment of the Armenians at the hands of Kurdish tribal militias. In the boycotts of the years before World War One, Muslim Cretan refugees (20,000 of whom had left the island and been resettled in the western Anatolian coastal area) played the role of militant vanguard. In Foça there does not seem to have been a previous history of ethnic conflict between resident Greeks and Turks in the area before 1912. It was the influx of refugees from the Balkans, themselves the victims of Greek and Bulgarian persecutions, that destabilised the situation, and although Talât Pasha claimed that what happened was the result of spontaneous feelings of revenge on the part of the refugees, this must be rejected. It is certainly true that the refugees from the Balkans played an active and violent role, particularly in the pillaging of the Greek possessions once the expulsions had started. Migrants played a prominent role in the Diyarbakır massacres as well. The governor himself was a Circassian refugee from the Caucasus, as were his militias, and the resettlement of Muslim refugees from the Balkans on “abandoned” Armenian properties was just as much part of the demographic policies of the Committee of Union and Progress as the removal of the Armenians.

Migration is not only a phenomenon that can be linked causally to each of these cases of ethnic violence, it is also one of the long-term results of the violence. The Armenian port workers of Istanbul as well as many middle class Armenians, left the capital after the pogroms, never to return (and as Dinçer shows, this was a migration that the government encouraged). Many of the Greeks that were expelled in 1914 did return when the Hellenic army occupied Western Anatolia in 1919, but they had to leave once more, this time for good, when that army was defeated in 1922. The very few Armenians who survived the deportations and massacres in Diyarbakır emigrated to Syria, France and the United States.

Conclusion

The policies of the central state, the involvement of local officials and civil society leaders, activation of immanent ideologies of difference under the new banner of nationalism, mobilisation of popular groups that were, at least, partly motivated by economic gain, a prominent role for migrants both

among the perpetrators and among the victims – these are the factors that seem to be present in most, if not all of the case studies, and each of the instances of ethnic violence presented in this special issue was the result of the complicated interplay between these factors. In that sense, these empirical studies confirm some of Michael Mann’s views on the conditions under which there is a risk of ethnic cleansing and genocide as well as Norman Naimark’s classification of the actors involved. Looking at ethnic violence this way takes us away from the more primitive paradigms that have long been dominant in late Ottoman history, and in particular in the discussions on the Armenian genocide, in which interpretations are based either on the concept of ideologically motivated policies instigated by the central state and executed by its local representatives, or on that of interethnic conflict that is the result of the “spontaneous” actions of popular movements. It is clear that monocausal explanations of ethnic violence, and particularly of the mobilisation of social groups for ethnic violence, are insufficient and that we need to look at the problem simultaneously top-down and bottom-up and devote special attention to the middle ground where designs of ideologically motivated politicians intersect with concerns and interests of social groups and where reciprocal manipulation takes place.

Biography

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